



Department of Rehabilitation Services
Testimony before the Human Services Committee
House Bill 6765 - March 17, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Moore and Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services or DORS. I am offering this testimony in support of House Bill 6765, An Act Concerning Interpreter Qualifications.

Last year, this committee and the General Assembly passed House Bill 5321, also titled An Act Concerning Interpreter Qualifications, which became known as Public Act 14-15. This bill instructed the Department of Rehabilitation Services to work with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities as well as the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf on the issue of interpreter standards. We were asked to report back to you with recommendations about these standards, timelines for adopting standards, a fee structure for interpreters and, lastly, methods to monitor compliance with those standards. We submitted our report to you and House Bill 6765 encompasses the recommendations contained in that report.

Last year's bill also asked us to consult with the Commissioner of Education on the need for and availability of qualified interpreters for Connecticut students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We have consulted with the state Department of Education and Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education. As you see in our report, we found that there is much more to be learned about the needs of these students including the actual number of such students in Connecticut's schools. We are even now undertaking a more in-depth study of this population and their needs for qualified interpreting. We will have completed surveys and more detailed analysis that we will make available to you by the fall of this year.

Regarding the bill before us, we believe that we have produced a proposal that will move the quality of interpreting in this state further into the 21st century. Working with the Connecticut Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, we are proposing more modern requirements to ensure that the needs of Connecticut's citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing are effectively served by high-quality interpreting.

Of particular interest, the bill creates a category for "educational interpreting" in addition to the existing "medical" and "legal" categories. It is felt that these three areas of interpreting

require additional skill and knowledge of the specialized vocabulary and practices in these fields. The bill also creates, for the first time, a category of "Community Setting" interpreting which will encompass all those occasions that do not fit into the medical, legal or educational categories and do not necessarily require those levels of specialization.

I will also point out that the bill enumerates exceptions to these requirements on certain occasions, for example, during an internship or a religious service or an emergency. We also allow for a department-issued waiver from these requirements which may be necessary when special circumstances arise especially in the upcoming period of transition created by the bill.

We will be submitting certain changes to the text of the bill before you. We have been engaged in ongoing discussions with Connecticut registry of the Deaf Task Force ever since the issuance of the report. The Department agrees that some small adjustments and technical changes would improve the bill as you see it. The one change of greater interest is the addition of a second stage – or phase-in - of standard requirements for interpreters working in an "educational" setting. We now propose to make some of the more demanding requirements in this part of bill effective in 2017 rather than this year. This phasing-in will allow more time for educational interpreters to acquire the necessary training and education to meet these newer standards.

I do feel it is important to share with the Committee what this bill does not contain. Our report and this bill do not propose the creation of an Interpreting Standards and Monitoring Boards. As well, we do not propose the adoption of annual fees for interpreters nor sanctions and fines for any interpreters, agencies, schools or institutions that may fall afoul of any rules in this area. We certainly take seriously the issue of high-quality interpreting services, performance and compliance. At this time, we believe that our agency does not have the financial and staff resources to support this broad, new undertaking. We will, of course, continue our historical support for excellence in interpreting as we also remain committed to a full array of excellent services for all of our clients.

I want to thank the Committee for your attention to our request. We are, of course, available for any further consultation in this matter.